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ABSTRACT

In recent years psychological studies of homosexuality have shifted in focus from homosexually-oriented persons to individuals manifesting homophobia, the irrational fear or intolerance of homosexuals. In a pilot study, 130 college students completed a preliminary questionnaire consisting of attitudes toward homosexuals and homosexuality. Two forms of a second questionnaire were administered to 906 college students. The lesbian target questionnaire was completed by 276 females and 161 males. The male homosexual target questionnaire was completed by 282 females and 187 males. Results indicate that, for both sexes and for both targets, a fairly unified conception of homophobia emerges: homophobia can be defined as the belief that homosexuality is sick, wrong, and disgusting; and it poses a danger to society and a threat to the individual. Data analysis offers little in explaining why people hold negative attitudes toward homosexuals. Survey statements are appended. (NRB)

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Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Male Homosexuals: A Refined Factor Analytic Approach

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Attitudes Toward Male Homosexuals and Lesbians: A Refined Factor Analytic Approach

In the last two decades, we have seen a dramatic shift in the behavioral sciences in regard to homosexuality. We have gone from a view of homosexuality as a sickness to the idea that an erotic preference for members of one's same sex is merely different from, rather than inferior to, opposite-sex preference. And we now have a considerable amount of research which supports the notion that homosexuals are no more likely to be inherently maladjusted than are heterosexuals.

With this emerging view comes a new question for psychological research: if homosexuals are not, as such, unnatural or sick, why do so many people hold such negative attitudes toward them? One of the first attempts to grapple with this problem was published by Kenneth Smith (1971) almost ten years ago as a preliminary study of what he called "homophobia," the negative or fearful responding to homosexuality. Since that time, many researchers have attempted to discover the roots of homophobia, frequently relying upon questionnaire data to do so.

Unfortunately, the instruments that have been used to study attitudes toward homosexuality have usually failed to meet psychometric scaling requirements. Additionally, questions have been raised as to whether attitudes toward homosexuality are unidimensional or multidimensional, and whether attitude structures are different in relation to lesbians than in relation to male homosexuals.

An argument for the multidimensional nature of attitudes toward homosexuality was presented by Jim Millham (Millham, San Miguel, & Kellogg, 1976), who derived six factors from a pool of 38 items, using a principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation. Millham and his associates also found that different factor structures emerged from analysis of attitudes toward male homosexuals than emerged from attitudes toward lesbians.

While agreeing with his basic idea that attitudes toward homosexuality are multidimensional, I question some aspects of Millham's method. Especially problematic is his use of varimax rotation to define his factors, since this method assumes the factors to be orthogonal, or uncorrelated.

However, a moment's consideration raises doubts about the validity of this assumption in the case of attitudes toward homosexuality. After all, the existence of independent factors would indicate that many individuals could hold completely positive views about homosexuals on one factor (say, that homosexuals pose no threat to society) while adhering to very negative views on some other factor (say, that homosexuals do pose a personal threat). But common experience suggests these two aspects of attitudes toward homosexuality are very often related, though not necessarily identical. Therefore, it seems more appropriate to use a factor analytic technique that assumes the factors to be correlated in some way.

Such a technique was used in the present study. Questionnaire responses concerning attitudes toward homosexuality were factor analyzed using oblique rotation. This analysis suggests that, while attitudes toward homosexuality are probably multidimensional, these different dimensions are interrelated. Further, I found that while there are some differences in the structure of attitudes toward lesbians compared to attitudes toward male homosexuals, attitudes toward both groups involve the same general factor. This general factor, which was salient for both female and male respondents, seems to embody what has traditionally been called "homophobia."

Method

In a pilot study, a preliminary questionnaire was administered to 130 student volunteers (66 females, 64 males) at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. This questionnaire consisted of 59 statements relating to attitudes toward homosexuals and homosexuality, to which each subject responded using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Responses were submitted to principal components analysis using various rotations to discover which one best revealed the interrelationships among the data.

When a varimax rotation was used, five orthogonal factors were extracted which appeared generally to be similar to those obtained by Millham, et al. (1976). However, there were at least two indications that the assumption of orthogonal factors was not warranted. First, a single factor accounted for a

major portion of the variance---in this case 41% compared to 6% for the other four factors combined---indicating the presence of one general factor. Second, inspection of the graphic representations obtained from plotting all possible pairs of factors, one against the other, suggested the likelihood of an oblique configuration, that is, the factors appeared to be correlated.

To test this hypothesis, responses to the 59 items were submitted to an oblique rotation. This yielded a general factor which accounted for 39% of the total variance, and three lesser factors which together acccunted for 11.5% of the total variance; while the lesser factors were not intercorrelated, they were correlated with the general factor at levels ranging from $r = .30$ to $r = .50$. Thus it appeared that an oblique rotation was appropriate rather than a varimax rotation.

To confirm these preliminary results, a second questionnaire was constructed, administered to a larger sample, and factor analyzed. This second questionnaire consisted of 66 items, including all of those used in Millham's analysis. Since he reported differences between attitudes toward male homosexuals and lesbians, two forms of the questionnaire were used, one with a lesbian target and the other with a male homosexual target. Each questionnaire employed a nine-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

The second questionnaire was administered to students in introductory psychology classes at the University of California

at Davis, California State University at Sacramento, California State University at Chico, and Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. A total of 437 subjects completed the lesbian target questionnaire (276 females, 161 males) and 469 subjects completed the male homosexual target questionnaire (282 females, 187 males).

Millham and others have reported similar response patterns to homosexuality questionnaires by male and female subjects. To test this finding, responses from males and females were analyzed separately for each of the two questionnaire forms, which resulted in four data sets (lesbian target responses for males and for females, male homosexual target responses for males and for females). Each of these data sets was submitted to an SPSS principal component factor analysis, using oblique rotation with an initial delta value set at zero, since this had yielded the most interpretable factors in the preliminary study. It was initially hypothesized that, as in the preliminary study, each data set would show a general factor plus three smaller correlated factors. However, additional analyses were also performed in which the number of factors extracted and the degree of obliqueness were varied, to determine if this might provide a more interpretable pattern of factors. These additional rotations led to a slightly different result for each data set.

Results

Each set of responses yielded a general factor, one smaller factor, and several additional factors which, while interpretable,

did not account for a sufficient proportion of the total variance to be included in the final analysis. The differences among groups for these minor factors suggest some subtle distinctions can be made between responses to male homosexual and lesbian targets, and between responses made by female and male subjects. These distinctions seem sufficiently important to prohibit combining the responses for the four groups. But, while the differences among groups are probably significant, of greater interest are the similarities.

For all four groups, a general factor accounts for approximately 35% of the total variance in responses, as shown in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

This factor consists of items which condemn homosexuality as unnatural, disgusting, perverse, sinful, as a danger to society (and therefore requiring negative social sanctions) and as a source of personal anxiety to the individual respondent (and thus leading to avoidance of contact with homosexuals). Because it includes cultural and personal attitudes, I have labeled this factor HOMOPHOBIA, the term usually applied to anti-homosexual attitudes in the personal and social spheres.

The second factor was also similar for all four groups, accounting for an additional 4.5% of the total variance for each group. I have labeled this factor SEX-ROLE DISCORD, as it implies a view of intrinsic disharmony and antagonism between

homosexuals and those who wish to uphold traditional social sex roles. For example, lesbians are viewed as having masculine characteristics, and as hating and fearing men while constantly trying to recruit other women to lesbianism. At the same time there is a belief that lesbians can be converted to heterosexuality by a sexually-skillful man. Similar views are held about male homosexuals.

Discussion

The present analysis is relevant to several issues important to the study of attitudes toward homosexuality in American culture.

In regard to the question of whether there are attitudinal differences between males and females, and whether there are differences in the structure of attitudes toward male homosexuals and lesbians, the answer appears to be yes---and no. Yes, in that the factor patterns between the sexes and in relation to the two different targets are clearly different in regard to the smaller factors. But no in that, for both sexes and for both targets, a fairly unified conception emerges of what we have called homophobia. Homophobia may now be defined empirically as the general belief that homosexuality is sick, wrong, and disgusting, that it poses a danger to society (and should therefore be negatively sanctioned) and a threat to the individual (leading to an avoidance of contact with homosexuals).

Another issue addressed by the results of this study is the relationship between attitudes toward homosexuality and

attitudes toward traditional sex roles. At least two different researchers (Minnigerode, 1976; MacDonald & Games, 1974), using different attitude measures, have found strong correlations (close to .60) between adherence to traditional sex roles and negative attitudes toward homosexuals. In the present research, this relationship is expressed in the SEX-ROLE DISCORD factor which emerged for each data set. It seems that a small but significant portion of negative attitudes toward homosexuality is related to the perception that homosexuals violate traditional sex roles, not only in external mannerisms but also in their approach to all things sexual.

However, analysis of the factors offers little in explaining why people hold negative attitudes toward homosexuals, why people subscribe to beliefs which I have characterized as "homophobic." I would like to suggest two research strategies which may be useful in answering this basic question.

First, attitudes toward homosexuality might be partly explained by analysis of the functions these attitudes serve for any particular individual. Katz (1960), for example, has outlined four general functions of attitudes, suggesting that an individual will maintain her/his present attitudes as long as they remain functional in some way. We may profit from applying these functional categories to attitudes toward homosexuality.

First, such attitudes may serve a knowledge function; people may hold particular attitudes toward lesbians and male

homosexuals in order to make sense of the world and to understand the events impinging upon their lives. Persons who are bewildered by homosexual orientation and who believe homosexuals constitute a completely different species of creatures may form negative opinions toward homosexuals. When attitudes are serving this knowledge function, educational programs are undoubtedly the best way to change them.

Second, attitudes may serve an ego-defensive function, i.e., they may assist an individual in fending off unconscious conflicts. In this regard, individuals with negative attitudes toward homosexuals may be struggling with their own unresolved conflicts concerning homosexuality, or perhaps sex in general. When homophobic attitudes serve this function, it will be difficult to change them without dealing with the unconscious conflicts with which they are associated.

Third, attitudes may serve an adjustive function, helping an individual to get along with other people. Negative attitudes toward homosexuality may strengthen the ties of a person with some particular social group by distancing her/him from another group, viz., homosexuals. To change attitudes that serve the adjustive function, it will be necessary to provide social support for people who express positive attitudes toward homosexuals. Ironically, this was an outcome of the Anita Bryant crusade: she made pro-homosexual attitudes more "respectable" than they had been, so more social support was available (especially in liberal circles) for anyone expressing

these attitudes.

The fourth functional attitude category defined by Katz is the value-expressive function. Attitudes express a sense of self-identity, proclaiming one's values to the world as well as to oneself. To change attitudes which are value-expressive, it is necessary to convince people that their attitudes are inconsistent with their self-image. This might be accomplished, for example, by convincing people that negative attitudes toward homosexuals are inconsistent with religious or ethical philosophies that uphold the inherent worth of every individual.

Of course, attitudes may serve one or several of these functions, and it is not particularly useful to pigeon-hole individuals into specific functional categories. What is of value, however, is the multi-dimensional approach to attitude change which emerges from this sort of analysis. After determining that an individual holds "homophobic" attitudes, we can pursue a variety of methods for changing those attitudes depending upon what function(s) the attitudes seem to serve.

A second research strategy for understanding the roots of homophobia involves analysis of cross-cultural data, an approach which will expand our perspective from the purely psychological to a consideration of sociological, biological, and ecological factors as well. An example of this analysis at the societal level is Dennis Werner's (1979)

study of the relationship between a culture's general acceptance of homosexuality and the carrying capacity of the land they inhabit. Werner found that societies more often tend to permit homosexual behavior when the food resources of their environments are scarce. While not yet providing definitive answers, cross-cultural research can eventually explain what cultural factors lead to acceptance or rejection of homosexuality, and this can contribute to an understanding of homophobia in our own society.

From the present research, we can see that there are some differences between the sexes in the way that attitudes toward homosexuality are structured. Further, we can see structural differences between attitudes toward male homosexuals and toward lesbians. But what is perhaps most interesting is the emergence of one factor which is basically the same for both sexes, and which characterizes attitudes toward both lesbians and male homosexuals. This is the factor I have labeled HOMOPHOBIA. It represents a cluster of attitudes for which we have already developed an intuitive understanding. The present research permits the beginning of an empirical understanding as well.

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Table 1

Proportion of Total Variance Accounted for by Factors Relating to Attitudes Toward Homosexuals

	Lesbian Target		Male Homosexual Target	
Factor Name	Male Responses	Female Responses	Male Responses	Female Responses
HOMOPHOBIA	32.5	34.9	35.1	37.0
SEX-ROLE DISCORD	5.6	4.9	3.9	3.4

Correlations between HOMOPHOBIA and SEX-ROLE DISCORD factors were: for lesbian target, .45 (male responses) and .48 (female responses); for male homosexual target, .36 (males) and .45 (females).

Above values were determined using SPSS principal components analysis with oblique rotation; Delta= 0.00; two factors were extracted for the final analysis.

Appendix A

Items Loading on HOMOPHOBIA Factor

(Note: These are items whose loadings on the Factor Pattern matrix were greater than .30 for all four response groups. All loadings are based on SPSS Principal Components analysis with oblique rotation; Delta= 0; two factors were extracted for the analysis. All factor matrices are available upon request from the author. Items listed below are for lesbian target.)

1. The growing number of lesbians indicates a decline in American morals.

*2. Laws regulating lesbian behavior should be loosened.

*3. Lesbian couples should be allowed to adopt children the same as heterosexual couples.

4. Lesbians are sick

*5. I would not be too upset if I learned that my daughter were a lesbian.

6. Homosexual behavior between two women is just plain wrong.

7. Lesbians should not be allowed to hold responsible positions.

*8. It would be very easy for me to have a conversation with a woman I know to be a lesbian.

9. By its nature, sex between two lesbians can only be animalistic pleasure.

10. Lesbians should be required to undergo psychotherapy.

11. I would be nervous if a lesbian sat next to me on a bus.

12. Female homosexuality is a sin.

*13. Female homosexuality is merely a different kind of lifestyle that should not be condemned.

*14. There is an element of homosexuality in all men and women.

*15. Just as in other species, female homosexuality is a natural expression of sexuality in human women.

*16. I would like to have lesbian friends.

Appendix A (continued)

*17. Lesbian couples should be allowed to dance together in public places the same as heterosexuals.

18. I would not like to have lesbian friends.

19. Practicing lesbians should not be allowed to be members of churches or synagogues.

20. I think lesbians are disgusting.

21. Female homosexuality is a threat to many of our basic social institutions.

22. Laws against homosexuality are necessary to keep down the number of lesbians in the population.

23. Lesbians should not be allowed to teach school.

24. Bars that cater solely to lesbians should be placed in one specific and known part of town.

25. If my sister (or best female friend, if you do not have a sister) told me she were a homosexual, it would distress me greatly.

26. If a woman has homosexual feelings, she should do everything she can to overcome them.

27. Female homosexuality is detrimental to society because it breaks down the natural divisions between the sexes.

28. Female homosexuality is a perversion.

29. Lesbians just don't fit into our society.

*30. Lesbians should be allowed to teach young children.

*31. I would not change my feelings toward a friend if I learned she were a lesbian.

*32. Many lesbians are very moral and ethical people.

*33. Female homosexuality in itself is no problem, but what society makes of it can be a problem.

*34. A woman's homosexuality should not be a cause for job discrimination in any situation.

Appendix A (continued)

35. Female homosexuality is an inferior form of sexuality.

36. The idea of lesbian marriages seems ridiculous to me.

37. If I learned my daughter were a lesbian, I would suggest she seek psychiatric help.

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*These items loaded negatively.

Appendix B

Items Loading on SEX-ROLE DISCORD Factor

Part I: Items with loadings greater than .30 for all four groups.

38. Most male homosexuals have some identifiable feminine characteristics.

39. It is usually easy to identify a homosexual man.

40. Male homosexuals are more likely to seduce young people than are heterosexuals.

41. Male homosexuals tend to be very feminine.

42. Most male homosexuals are generally afraid of women.

43. Men who are constantly touching other men probably have homosexual tendencies.

44. Most male homosexuals have unusually strong sex drives.

45. An enjoyable sexual experience with another man can change a heterosexual man into a homosexual.

46. A majority of male homosexuals find employment in the arts or in such professions as hairdressing or interior decorating. (note: for female target, substitute "...employment in masculine professions such as truck-driving or teaching gym.")

Part II: Items with loadings greater than .30 for lesbian target only (male and female responses).

47. Lesbians are more likely to commit crimes (nonsexual) than are heterosexual women.

48. By its nature, sex between two lesbians can only be animalistic pleasure.

49. Lesbians should be required to undergo psychotherapy.

50. Lesbians can be turned into heterosexuals by men who have enough sexual skills.

51. Lesbians use physical injury as part of their sexual behavior.

52. Lesbians don't have the same stake in maintaining social order as heterosexuals have.

Appendix B (continued)

53. Lesbians tend to be a high security risk for government jobs.

54. Most lesbians probably hate men.

55. Most lesbians wish they could be heterosexuals.